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When Citizens Call or Complain:

Would the Dutch Informal Pro-active Approach Model (IPAM) benefit the United States?



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Part

1

Handling conflicts between citizens and government organisations effectively: the Dutch Informal Pro-active Approach Model (IPAM)

Lynn van der Velden
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Introduction

Main problem

Both the private sector (citizens and businesses) and government spend millions in hours and euros every year on complaint, objection and appeal procedures against government decisions. Of the total amount of administrative burdens (red tape) for citizens in the Netherlands 11% is caused by complaint, objection and appeal procedures. The costs of these complaint handling and conflict resolution procedures and the dissatisfaction with them have only increased over the last couple of years. An example is the significant increase of subsidized legal aid over the last few years. So much so, that it has become unpayable and therefore subject to current retrenchment policy. In addition, formalistic and legalistic (written) complaint, objection and appeal procedures have been selected by the Dutch citizens as one of the top ten most pressing bottlenecks in government services.

Complaint, objection and appeal procedures

The government is a bureaucratic system and operates according to rules and regulations. As the government determines the rules and the manner in which they are applied, it puts government organisations in a position of power. The higher level of knowledge of the government (on rules, regulations and procedures) compared to that of citizens adds to the inequality. Government organisations are responsible for decisions on whether for example an individual can be granted a building permit, is entitled to receive income support, has to pay taxes or is entitled to receive a refund or a subsidy. When citizens do not agree with such a government decision, discover mistakes, or do not understand a decision taken, traditionally their only possibility to address this is through a formalistic, legalistic and written complaint, objection or appeal procedure.

Pioneer project

Definition IPAM

The above mentioned problems are addressed in a Dutch government policy project. This project provides a fundamental change for complaint handling and conflict resolution in public administration. From a traditional, formal, judicial, procedural and written approach the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations initiates, stimulates and supports an Informal Pro-active Approach Model (IPAM) for all government organisations.

The new pro-active, personal and solution driven approach consists of two interventions;

1. Upon receiving an objection against a government decision;

- a public servant ensures quick and *direct personal contact* with the citizen concerned (telephone call or informal meeting);
- the public servant uses *communication skills* such as listening, summarizing and questioning from an open, unbiased approach and certain conflict management techniques that can lead to de-escalation and conflict resolution.

The public servant uses communication techniques that are derived from mediation. These communication skills will hereafter be referred to as mediation-like techniques. It is however important to note that this approach is essentially different from mediation as there is no other neutral person involved and no mediation takes place.

- 2. During the preliminary phase in decision making,** (before a government decision is made) that has negative consequences for a certain person, the citizen concerned is contacted to test, among other things, that the information on which the decision will be based is correct and complete and in order to explain why a certain decision is about to be made and to explore possible alternative solutions with the citizen. This in order to invest in the quality of decisions made plus investing in the underlying relationship between government and citizen and in order to avoid future objection procedures wherever possible.

Research

Results

Research into the effects of a pro-active solution driven approach to complaint, objection and appeal procedures shows a reduction in the number procedures, saving the authorities time and money (20%-30% cost reduction) and increasing citizen satisfaction by 40% and improving job satisfaction for government employees by 20%. In 40%-60% of the cases where the informal approach was used a solution was found and the objection procedure was cancelled. It also showed a positive effect on the processing time of objection cases (37% reduction of processing time).

The effect of traditional complaint, objection or appeal procedures

For citizens the stated formal way of conflict resolution by the government and the impersonal written communication during complaint and objection procedures can lead to feelings of helplessness, unfair dependency and possible escalation of the conflict. In many situations, the government has to decide between the interests of the general public and the interests of

an individual or business. Stressing the legal position, simply referring to the general public's interest (which the government represents) or to the rules and regulations as a reason, is unconvincing and unsatisfactory for citizens.

Citizens consider themselves regularly as not being taken seriously or treated unfairly. Citizens want to understand why they are denied a permit or a certain benefit. Citizens have a human desire to be able to talk about it, and even more importantly to be heard, by public servants. Research shows that it is not only the outcome or the result of a government decision that determines whether citizens feel as if they were treated fairly, but in fact, it is the manner in which the outcome is reached or the process leading to it. More specifically, it is the opportunity of being heard during the process that is essential to citizens, in combination with a fair, transparent and timely procedure. Thus, the government decision making process in itself is largely responsible for a citizen's perception of justice. The government's formal, written, unilateral emphasis on legal positions and the law comes across as forceful, creates a distance between government and its citizens and therefore is a source of conflict in itself.



Many citizens perceive decisions by government officials as unfair. The only option they have is to start a formal procedure. This results in numerous, often unnecessary complaint, objection and appeal procedures. Unnecessary, as these are due to a perceived lack of procedural justice, and might have been prevented if another procedure was followed. These unnecessary complaint and objection procedures require an investment of time and energy of both government and citizens and can result in a lack of understanding, frustration, increased administrative burdens and a significant amount of costs for the government while the underlying problem often remains unsolved. The direct communication between government organisations and citizens provided an incentive for quality improvement and created learning government organisations. In particular when communication with citizens already took place during the preliminary phase in decision making.

A pro-active personal approach through a telephone call or informal meeting with the use of mediation-like techniques created opportunities for government officials to gain insight in what the public needs were, what services cause complaints, what possible solutions could be relevant and therefore what would provide a genuine improvement of government services. Because of this process the pioneer project already has several showcases of improvement of complaint and objection procedures that can be duplicated by other government organisations.

The qualitative research results

The improvement in customer satisfaction was mainly due to individuals and businesses perceiving the relationship with the authorities as more ‘personal’ when mediation –like techniques were applied. The quick response, the way they are treated and the extra explanation regarding the decision taken is highly appreciated. They felt that they were taken seriously, as someone was actually listening to them. The personal attention had a positive influence. Most citizens considered themselves an equal partner. Furthermore citizens appreciated the solution driven approach. Respondents said that through the pro-active solution driven approach using mediation techniques, government was given a face; they came into contact with a person over the telephone, asking what the problem is, listening, explaining, giving information and actively working together with them towards a solution.

Furthermore the research showed that not only the outcome of the proceeding had an effect on the feeling of being treated fairly, but also the manner in which the outcome is reached. Citizens attributed the feeling of being treated fairly to the procedure leading up to a decision. Not only the ultimate outcome of a procedure, but also the procedure itself and information leading to a decision proved to be essential. With a personal and appropriate approach, citizens were not only more satisfied with the government, but their trust in government seemed to grow. Initially the new approach required an investment, but, in time, financial benefits seem to outweigh the costs, both in the process itself, as well as in the implementation (such as team development, education, and communication).

Involvement of citizens

A pro-active solution driven approach to complaint, objection and appeal procedures places citizens at the heart of public services, and gives citizens a voice both during the preliminary phase of decision making by administrations, as well as during the handling of complaint and objection procedures. Through a pro-active solution driven approach citizens are given a voice not only to share their opinions and concerns, but are also actively encouraged to submit their own creative suggestions and solutions how to combine their needs with public interests. It improves the communication between government and its citizens and strengthens their connection.



Improvement of the quality of government services

The traditional formal judicial complaint and objection procedures stress the legal positions by referring to the interest of the general public (which the government represents) or by referring to relevant rules and regulations. Through the traditional procedural approach government officials are not encouraged to find solutions for the problems that citizens endured, nor are they encouraged to think about any possibilities of improving government services because of the practical effect of the rules and regulations they apply. A pro-active personal approach through a telephone call or informal meeting with the use of mediation-like techniques creates the opportunity for government officials to gain insight in what the

public needs are, what services cause complaints, what possible solutions could be relevant and therefore what would provide a genuine improvement of government services. Because of this process the pioneer project already has several showcases of improvement of government services that can also be duplicated by other government organisations. The direct communication between government organisations and citizens provides a constant incentive for quality improvement and creates a learning organisation. In particular when communication with citizens already takes place during the preliminary phase in decision making by administrations.

Development of new skills and improvement of internal cooperation

Handling citizens' requests/applications in a pro-active way instead of a reactive way requires the development of new skills for public officials. Civil servants need to develop advanced communication skills in order to be able to deal with direct communication with citizens on potential conflicts occurring between the citizens wishes and the administrative policies. This also implies that more and better cooperation within and between government

organisations is necessary. A pro-active solution driven approach implies that the traditional division between the department handling requests/applications and the department handling judicial complaint and objection procedures is reconciled. A pro-active solution driven approach requires and ensures the involvement and cooperation of both departments.





Part

2

When Citizens Call or Complain: Would an informal pro-active approach benefit the United States?

James E. McGuire

Introduction

The Netherlands has developed several innovative programs to improve the responsiveness of agencies to citizen contacts with civil service agencies, including complaints, objections and appeals from administrative actions. One of these models is IPAM: Informal, Pro-active Approach Model. The centerpiece of this model is to train civil servants in the use of communication and mediation techniques to respond quickly and informally to citizen contacts, complaints, objections and appeals using an interest-based problem-solving approach. The goal is to enhance public service delivery by making informed decisions together with the concerned citizens which procedure or approach best suits the matter at hand. Fundamentally, this means that there is a choice to be made for the way a certain conflict is handled: the formal, more traditional and legalistic approach or the informal and pro-active approach.

Are there counter-part programs already in use in the United States? If not, is this a useful model to be considered? What challenges or obstacles can be identified

in considering the possible use of this approach? This article provides some background information on approaches used in the United States for handling citizen contacts, including complaints, objections, and appeals and provides some thoughts on the export of IPAM to the U.S.

Summary answer

There is no generally accepted second path for agencies to respond to citizen complaints as an alternative to well-established rules and procedures for handling administrative complaints. Since 1990, all federal agencies have had a mandate to develop alternative dispute resolution procedures. Each agency has been left to fashion new procedures tailored to the needs and problems of that agency. Mediation has emerged as the preferred model for many agencies. Some have created an institutional ombudsman. Though many ombudsman programs focus on internal agency employment and work relationship issues, some focus on providing solutions for individual citizen complaints about the agency.

Some federal and state agency ADR specialists provide training and support to encourage government employees to try informal, more flexible approaches to problem-solving and interactions with the public. Governmental agencies at all levels of the U.S. government would benefit from consideration of informal, pro-active approaches for problem-solving by civil servants, rather than use of mediators or ombuds after problems have arisen. Why? The Netherlands model suggests strongly that this is more efficient. As important and more difficult to quantify, this approach gives real power to real people, both civil servants and citizens to believe in their own problem solving and conflict resolution skills. It is applied common sense that leads to good government.



Background information about the United States

Foundational belief

When citizens complain, how should the government respond? In the United States, we cherish our foundational belief that our government, is “of the people, by the people, and for the people.” Our belief in the supremacy of the rule of law is a related bedrock principle, captured by John Adams’ phrase, “we are a nation of laws, not of men.” Applied to our governmental agencies, these principles resulted in the creation of formal systems for dealing with grievances and complaints. Formal systems offer predictability of process with the goal of equal access and equal treatment. All citizens should have equal access and the results of similar cases should be similar based on applying uniformly the same set of statutes, rules and regulations. “Citizen” can mean a private individual; “citizen” can also mean a large corporate entity treated as a legal “person” for many purposes under our system of laws.

The Administrative Procedure Act (APA)

The Great Depression and the New Deal of the 1930's transformed the United States into a modern nation with major agencies to provide services and to regulate the affairs of its citizens on a scale virtually unrecognizable at any earlier time in our short history as a nation. In the second half of the 20th century, the United States tried to make these large agencies become predictable and more uniform in dealing with all forms of citizen complaints about agency action. The major legislative solution to this challenge was the Administrative Procedure Act of 1946, 5 U.S.C. § 500 et seq. ("APA"). The APA governs both rule-making and regulatory enforcement, the twin towers of administrative agency power. The several states adopted similar administrative procedural rules, suggested by a Model Rule, the State Administrative Procedure Act. The APA is a very formal system. In its structure and approach, it embodies our bedrock beliefs of equal access and the supremacy of the rule of law. Administrative tribunals resemble our courts. The APA approach to rule-making also adopted an adversarial arms-length approach. Even though the APA itself provides for the adoption of informal procedures, little was done to make such informal approaches an integral

part of agency procedures until the more modern era of the development of ADR.

Barriers for resolving citizen complaints informally

The bedrock beliefs created barriers, or at least a major challenge, to the consideration of informal systems for resolving citizen complaints. Informal systems offer flexibility, not predictability, and may detract from our notions of equality, including the concepts of equal access and equal treatment. An informal approach may lack the implicit guarantee that like cases should be handled and decided in like manner. Yet, formal approaches may be too cumbersome to use in all cases. In some cases, administrative rules may not be workable or implemented properly. These problems and this tension between formal and informal systems are not new topics. In the 1960's, a noted administrative law scholar, Walter Gellhorn wrote a book entitled, *When Americans Complain: Governmental Grievance Procedures*.¹ Professor Gellhorn discussed the limitations of relying only on formal systems.

Based on his survey work on nine ombudsmen programs in European and other countries, he championed consideration of the use of ombudsmen as a way of improving the governmental agencies in the United States. Though progress on the responsiveness of agencies has been made, some would say that his book is topical even today.

Safety valves

Our governmental system has developed "safety valves" to help the citizen when the bureaucracy is not responsive. In some cases, the safety valve can be a call from an elected official, such as a Congressman (member of the United States House of Representatives; elected every two years from congressional districts in all fifty states). At the state and local level, intervention by elected officials also occurs

with varying degrees of effectiveness. Elected politicians have a strong interest in providing intervention services to help their constituents. Such intervention requires access and access may be influenced unduly by campaign contributions. Political intervention may be viewed by administrative agencies as a necessary "evil", a fact to be reckoned with and not welcomed.

An informal approach may lack the implicit guarantee that like cases should be handled and decided in like manner. Yet, formal approaches may be too cumbersome to use in all cases.

¹ Gellhorn, Walter, *When Americans Complain: Governmental Grievance Procedures* (Harvard University Press 1966). The book was based on Professor Gellhorn's delivery of the Oliver Wendell Holmes Lectures at Harvard University in March 1966. In the same year, he published his book *Ombudsmen and Others: Citizen Protector's in Nine Countries* (1966) based on his field research of ombudsmen programs in Europe and other countries.



The office of the ombuds

To make access to agencies more equal for all citizens and more palatable to the agency, in the last 20-30 years, many agencies have developed the office of the ombuds. An agency or institutional ombuds may be authorized and expected to receive and act on citizen complaints about non-responsive agencies. Another approach is the use of mediators; internal to the agency or external, independent mediators. Most mediators and most ombuds use the tools of interest-based negotiation and facilitation to do their job. What these three approaches have in common is the use of a third party to coax, prompt or help the agency and its civil servants to do their basic job in a better way, at least as applied to the particular case.

De-regulation

In the United States, de-regulation has been the dominant approach to bureaucratic delay and inefficiencies in the last thirty-four years. Entire industry sectors including large parts of the transportation industry (airlines and trucking) and public utilities (telephone and electrical power) were de-regulated. In other cases, regulation itself was privatized and industries were encouraged to create their own regulatory

and oversight structures. De-regulation thus shifts complaint-handling procedures to the private sector. Negotiated rule-making, where the industry was an active participant in drafting the rules that would govern its behavior, also became part of the administrative procedure process.

In some cases, there has been considerable concern that this approach has led to relationships between government and regulated industries that are too close and too cozy to be effective. The financial crisis of 2008 is still being studied. Some believe that a major contributing factor was the absence of effective regulation of new products offered by the financial sector and a break-down in effective regulation of the industry, using tools that were available. Food safety and effective regulation of food producers has been a matter of renewed concern with out-breaks of salmonella and e-coli prompting major recalls. In the same way, the environmental disaster in the Gulf of Mexico in the summer of 2010 resulting from the deep-water drilling of BP and its contractors has prompted inquiry on whether the regulators were too lax in their supervision of the oil industry.

Current informal approaches for handling citizen complaints

Legislation

In 1990, the United States Congress passed two important pieces of legislation relating generally to the need to make government more responsive through the use of alternatives to traditional dispute resolution processes, in our courts and in our agencies. One act encouraged all federal courts to develop ADR programs as part of a program to reduce expense and delay².

² The Civil Justice Reform Act of 1990, 28 U.S.C. §§ 471–482. Sponsored by then-Senator, now Vice-President of the United States, Joseph Biden, the Civil Justice Reform Act was “to promote for all citizens, rich or poor, individual or corporation, plaintiff or defendant, the just, speedy and inexpensive resolution of civil disputes in our Nation’s federal courts” (S. Rep. No. 101-416, 101 Cong., 2d Sess., at 1 [Aug. 3, 1990]). Each United States District Court was ordered to implement a Civil Justice Expense and Delay Reduction Plan. One provision provided funding for district courts that sought to implement an ADR program as one method of reducing expense and delay.

In 1998, the court legislation was re-enacted as a mandate, requiring all federal courts to develop some form of ADR.³ Another act, also first passed in 1990, required every federal agency to develop some form of ADR process to be made available to any citizen or company involved in a dispute with the agency⁴. Implementation of these regulatory

³ The Alternative Dispute Resolution Act of 1998, 28 U.S.C. §§ 651– 658, required that each district court authorize the use of ADR in all civil actions and devise its own program to encourage and promote the use of ADR, 28 U.S.C.A. § 651(b). Among other things, each district court must provide at least one ADR modality, which may include mediation by a magistrate-judge, 28 U.S.C. § 653(b).
⁴ The Administrative Dispute Resolution Act of 1990, 5 U.S.C. §§ 571– 583. The act was reauthorized in 1996 by the Administrative Dispute Resolution Act of 1996. As did its predecessor statute of 1990, the Administrative Dispute Resolution Act of 1996 authorized and encouraged federal agencies to use arbitration, mediation, negotiated rulemaking, and other consensual methods of dispute resolution. Related legislation was the Negotiated Rulemaking Act of 1990 («Reg-Neg»), 5 U.S.C. §§ 561 et seq. promoted the use of negotiated rulemaking by federal agencies to increase public acceptability and improve the substance of their rules and regulations. This act required an agency to consult with a regulated industry before adopting regulations affecting that industry.

requirements has been uneven. Some agencies embraced mediation as a meaningful method for managing agency matters. The United States Environmental Protection Agency was very successful in using mediation to help resolve some of the largest and most intractable environmental disputes—allocating the costs of environmental clean-up among corporations and governmental entities that were the potentially responsible parties. The Department of Justice in the 1990s provided major training initiatives to encourage its attorneys to use mediation even though the Department of Justice had the resources to match or out-spend any major corporation with which it was in litigation.

Institutional ombuds

Other agencies developed institutional ombuds as a mechanism both for dealing with internal employment-related complaints and for dealing with citizen complaints involving actions (or inactions) of the agency. Ombuds are present in many federal and state agencies. More than one dozen major U.S. cities now have an active ombuds

program. Most work in a traditional ombudsman role: handling individual citizen complaints and providing suggestion to the agency on areas in need of systemic solutions when the problems are re-current. More information about ombudsman in the United States is available from the website of the national ombudsman organization.⁵ This site provides basic information about governmental ombuds programs in the United States (federal, state and municipal).

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS)

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) is the federal agency that virtually every United States citizens has dealings with every year as almost all citizens file tax returns and pay taxes. The IRS has developed a program for citizens who have not had success in dealing with the established agency procedures for tax matters. The IRS provides an advocacy service (the Taxpayer Advocate Service) that attempts to cut through the red tape or other bureaucratic obstacles that a citizen might encounter in dealing with a complaint that is not met by the

⁵ See <http://www.usombudsman.org>.

ordinary IRS procedures.⁶ This service has been in existence for 10 years and provides assistance for taxpayers in all fifty states. For more systemic problems of agency rules and procedures involving more than one taxpayer, the IRS has developed a program called SAMS: SAMS is the Systemic Advocacy Management System; a database of issues and information submitted by IRS employees and the public.

The Food & Drug Administration (FDA)

The Food & Drug Administration (“FDA”) has both an agency-wide organization ombuds and has developed a specialty ombuds program for various centers to provide more tailored problem solving within a particular sector. For example CBER (Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research), CDER (Center for Drug Evaluation and Research), CDRH (Center for Devices and Radiological Health) and CVM (Center for Veterinary Medicine) each have a designated ombudsman.

With recent authority to regulate tobacco, the FDA also created a designated ombuds for the tobacco industry. For the business community, there is an ombuds for small businesses. Each ombuds works to resolve problems and issues occurring within their own respective center. If that effort is unsuccessful or if inter-center issues are involved, the matter will go to the FDA Ombudsman’s Office.⁷

Services and support for elderly people

Providing services and support for our elderly population is a national interest, affecting all citizens in all states. While true in all societies, this is a particularly pressing issue as the post-World War II, baby-boomer generation deals with aging parents and focuses on their own needs for service and support. This area involves all levels of government, federal, state and local, and involves in the inter-play between governmental agencies that fund and supervise and private companies that provide housing and other services for the elderly. This is an area where traditional litigation or agency administrative procedures do not provide good solutions for problem-solving. The national response has been the use of ombudsman and elderly ombuds programs exist in all states. Given the size of this ombuds initiative, there is a federally-funded National Long Term Care Ombudsman Resource Center to provide resources and assistance elderly care ombudsman programs.⁸

Municipalities

At the municipal level, certain major cities have embraced ombudsman programs as an integral part of providing a solution to the chronic problems of the responsiveness of local governments to unmet concerns of citizens.

The city of Portland, Oregon, has a very active municipal ombudsman. From their website:
*The City of Portland created the Office of the Ombudsman to assist the public with complaints and concerns about city agencies. The goals of the Ombudsman are to safeguard the rights of the people and promote higher standards of competency, efficiency and justice in the provision of city services. We are a part of the Office of the City Auditor, independent from the Mayor and City Council.*⁹

⁶ <http://www.irs.gov/advocate/index.html?portlet=5>.

⁷ For more information, see:
<http://www.fda.gov/AboutFDA/ContactFDA/ResolveaDispute/HowtoContactanOmbudsman/default.htm>

⁸ For more information, see: <http://www.Itcombudsman.org>.

⁹ For more information, see: <http://www.portlandonline.com/auditor/index.cfm?c=26647>.



Is IPAM available in the United States?

There does not appear to be any major institutional commitment to train civil servants in the use of informal pro-active approaches to handling citizen complaints. Those activities may occur as part of internal agency review of its own procedures. Systemic issues will likely be detected where the agency has an active ombuds program. Certainly, many agencies are trying to adopt a problem-solving approach to effective regulation and agency action. The success of the efforts may depend both on the size of the community and the existence of trained internal advocates for interest-based problem solving approaches. Although there does not appear to be wide-spread adoption of this approach, there are some examples where individuals within particular agencies have adopted these principles with good success.

An example

In one state agency, an internal agency mediator was consulted for new approaches involving chronic failures of small businesses to pay an annual registration fee. Regulations required all dry-cleaning establishments to register with the state agency and to pay U.S. \$500 as an annual registration. Non-compliance could result in fines

and penalties. The primary purpose for registration was to help the state environmental agency monitor point source discharges of chemicals used in the dry-cleaning industry that were known ground water contaminants. The agency experience had been that if the first letter requesting registration was not responded to, subsequent letters insisting on compliance and identifying penalties and possible sanctions were filed or discarded without reading. The reminder letters never had the intended effect of encouraging or increasing compliance. The agency back-log of un-resolved cases continued to grow, swamping administrative resources that were needed for other more important areas. When presented with the problem, the mediator asked the basic question: why were the dry-cleaning businesses failing to register? Upon investigation, the agency found that many of the dry-cleaning establishments were small businesses, many of which were owned by recent immigrants for whom English was a second language. In some cases, these owners also came from a political culture where graft and corruption of public officials was common and any approach by a government official was an event to be avoided if at all possible. The mediator then made the bold suggestion (obvious to users of IPAM): “Why not just give the business a call or a visit to discuss the matter informally?”

Authorize that person to waive fines and penalties to late registration and permit that individual authority to negotiate payment plans or even to reduce the filing fee in cases of actual financial hardship. The program was a dramatic success and the back-log issue was resolved.

“Why not just give the business a call or a visit to discuss the matter informally?”

Upon examination, it appeared that the success was the result of the work of some individuals who embraced the approach and were very effective. Other civil servants with the same instructions and seemingly similar cases were unsuccessful. The success of this program did not result in an agency review of all of its practices to determine whether other areas would benefit from an informal, pro-active problem-solving approach. There are undoubtedly other informal initiatives that are under-taken to make agencies more responsive to citizen complaints that are not widely reported. Some initiatives may be created by new directions from an agency head, directing staff to focus more on “can-do” though collaboration rather than “can’t do” based on confrontation.

Others start from a bottom-up approach initiated by agency staff, coached and supported by in-agency mediators and ombudsman.

Conclusion

Training agency personnel to use mediation techniques in an informal, pro-active problem-solving approach is not well-developed in the United States. Learning about the success of such systems in the Netherlands, in Scandinavia, and in other European Union countries will be of interest to many. Currently, both federal and state governmental agencies are experiencing resource challenges that approach crisis dimensions. How do we provide the same level of effective service with a greatly-reduced staff? How do we provide expanded services as more citizens apply to governmental agencies for assistance in dealing with the myriad problems that confront them in a time of financial stress? Use of informal techniques that promise efficient resolution of most minor complaints can reduce the over-all workload and permit more attention to more complex cases. IPAM and similar programs are worthy of further study.